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## RELIGION, REVELATION, AND MORAL CERTITUDE

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We are intent on securing a few clear and adequate conceptions which shall make our thinking straight. To that end we have proposed certain decisive questions, and we seek to turn upon them the light given us by the historical view of the holy Scriptures. What is revelation?—was the first question. How does man get the feel of the innermost reality of things? What is the nature of that reality? How do we come at it? How does it yield itself to us? And how are we to administer it that it may meet and satisfy the deepest human needs? To put a question badly—no matter how vital it may be—is to make it unanswerable. Now the final questions regarding the meaning and worth of life are summed up in the one question—What is revelation? How then must that supreme question be put, in order to draw from the deep of reality a convincing answer?

The upshot of our first study is this: Revelation, as the Old Testament knows it and attests it, is the saving process whereby God gives unity and coherence to human experience. But the experience in question is experience in its full reach and scope. First of all we put to one side our fixed distinction between church and state. The established usage of eighteen centuries and the fact that the relation between church and state is making so great a stir in the political and religious debates of our time make this a hard thing to do. We seem to be asking ourselves to suppress an instinctive mental action. But do this we must, if we would start with the prophet and travel with him.

In the second place, we must also forget, for the time being, our vast emphasis on personal immortality. This is as difficult for our emotion as the suppression of the distinction between church and state is for our reason. But do it we must. Otherwise, we become more or less absent-minded touching the central thing in the Old Testament. We unconsciously break up the unity of life as the

prophet viewed it. To get the feel of divine reality as he got it, we too must view life on earth in its full reach and scope. Think church and state together, bending the energies of both to a common moral task. Think this life and the next life together in the life eternal. Then we begin to understand what the divine unity, welling up within the heart of man, does for human experience. It informs and molds life with meaning. The divine unity unifies consciousness.

Mr. Balfour, speaking as president of the British Association, and speaking about the bearings of recent scientific discoveries upon our view of the universe, said:

Now, whether the main outlines of the world-picture which I have just imperfectly presented to you be destined to survive or whether they in their turn are to be obliterated by some new drawing on the scientific palimpsest, all will, I think, admit that so bold an attempt to unify physical nature excites feelings of the most acute intellectual gratification. The satisfaction it gives is almost aesthetic in its intensity and quality. We feel the same sort of pleasurable shock as when from the crest of some melancholy pass we see far below us the sudden glories of plain, river, and mountain.

The higher life in all its forms is a search for unity. But the level on which saving revelation acts is far more difficult than the level where reason seeks to unify physical nature. To unify the moral and spiritual nature of humanity, that is the task set before conscience. Just that, however, nothing less, is what the saving truth of the divine unity undertakes to do. The unity of life built upon the unity of God is the goal of revelation.

Not all at once does revelation reach its goal. In the history of prophetic monotheism there are periods and stages. Revelation is a historical process. The unity of God, inseparable from the unity of the nation, unfolds itself in keeping with the widening outlooks of the nation's life. Saving truth adapts itself to human need. Prophetic monotheism, in its earlier stage, is provincial, its scope restricted. Not until Israel is sucked into the current of world-empire and world-politics does monotheism clearly disclose its universal genius. But the value of the Old Testament as a book of witness to the logic of human experience becomes all the greater. The divine unity is seen to be the leaven hidden within the three measures of meal, until the whole is leavened.

At this point we seek another definition. What is religion? The ideas of revelation and religion are always found together in history, and in thought they are inseparable. No vital religion is possible unless there be some revelation of unseen reality, unless those larger things which are too great to be taken in by the eye and ear impress themselves upon the heart, carrying conviction and bestowing confidence. What, then, is religion?

In all its forms, from the lowest fetichism up to the highest and serenist monotheism, religion deals with human fear. Its pith and marrow is salvation from fear. Its concern is with the unseen forces and tendencies, and its aim is to determine their bearing on human happiness and destiny. The well-known lines of Burns go deep into our nature.

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best laid schemes of mice and men  
Gang aft a-gley,  
An' lea'e us naught but grief an' pain  
For promised joy.  
Still thou art blessed compar'd wi' me!  
The present only toucheth thee:  
But oh! I backward cast my e'e  
On prospects drear.  
An' forward tho' I canna see,  
I guess an' fear.

Religion from the first has sought to make man at home in the universe. Civilization and science give us insurance, lift us above the reach of many dangers and subject the ghosts to the reign of law. But the result is not that religion is dispensed with. Religion simply goes up to higher levels, and penetrates more deeply into the heart of life. For religion alone can master our ultimate fear, and unless that be mastered, the will in us that makes for righteousness is disabled. It is fear that makes men the ignoble slaves of the present, by shutting out the future. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (Isa. 22:13; I Cor. 15:32). It is fear that on a Black Friday turns the stock market into an insane asylum. It is a panic of fear that dissolves a great army into a disgraceful mob.

Religion conquers fear by giving man a consciousness of backing.

A formula in Babylonian religion, relating to a ritualistic action or sacred observance, runs thus—It gives me ease of heart. Heart's ease for mature people who know their world—that is the end and aim of all religion. "That we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear" (Luke 1:74). "For ye received not the spirit of bondage again into fear" (Rom. 8:15). "I have set the Lord always before me: Because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Ps. 16:8).

But the kind and quality of religion depends upon the kind of fear which sets it on its course, giving bias and bent to the whole body of fears and so giving shape and color to the idea of salvation. Now, the fear with which prophetism deals is fear regarding the future of the nation. And prophetism finds salvation from fear in the saving unity of God, which gives to conscience unity and confidence, to the will strength and temper. Dr. Morton Prince, in his *Dissociation of a Personality* has given us a vivid picture of the working of nervous disease. The elements of consciousness cannot be assembled and unified. The will disintegrates. Now it is the function of religion, when life has given birth to distressing problems and when the future looms darkly, to assemble and unify all the elements of consciousness and so give integrity to the will. Prophetic religion, taking the nation as the unit of feeling and thought, conquers fear by a splendid consciousness of backing and so makes the prophet, that is to say, the redeemed man, confident and strong.

Here we get our bearings on religion and revelation as the Old Testament defines them. Standing here we can take up the second of the four decisive questions proposed in the first study of this series—What is law? Law is the central problem in the life of man. At all costs we must agree upon this, if we are to reason together. Americans, above all men, need to be careful regarding this question. The American's virtue is a splendid individualism. But he has the defects of his virtue. Because of his history he is immensely individualistic in religion. And on account of his surroundings and his needs, he is apt to be immensely individualistic in his search for culture. So in dealing with the question of authority the American, of all men, needs the teaching and inspiration of the Old Testament.

Law is man's primary concern. The reason why religion is the

deepest concern of a nation is because religion alone can lay a solid and enduring foundation for law. The Old Testament, viewed in the light of history, speaks on this matter with complete decision.

What, then, is law? The term has many uses. But, roughly speaking, in every phase law is the element of coherence within a given mass of facts, constituting the mass an organism of meanings. For example, we feel an increasing need to know the weather. The weather bureau, to satisfy the need, is constantly going deeper into the mass of phenomena which we roughly call weather. By the study of the upper air, by direct study of the sun, and by assembling and organizing the increasing weather-knowledge of the whole earth, the law of weather will disclose itself and prediction increase both in range and precision. Again, in some great convention, say the constitutional convention of 1787, mind clashes with mind, will bears down on will, interests first collide and then compromise, until out of the apparent welter of opinion a majestic organic law comes into view.

Law is the ultimate difficulty and problem. Plato and Aristotle were fond of saying that philosophy begins in wonder, that is to say, in an acute sense of difficulties attended by a solid conviction that somewhere a solution of the difficulties may be found. Revelation also begins in wonder and is kept alive by wonder. Dillmann has finely said, "Revelation is the part and lot only of the seeker and the needy." The prophet is a man conscious of an immense need. He is "a man of unclean lips, and dwelleth in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). The nation falls immeasurably short of the divine ideal. But through this need and the saving word of God which it publishes, the New Jerusalem, the Heavenly Zion, is founded (Isa. 14:32; 24:23; 28:16; 33:5). Religion seeks to make men at home with the unseen forces and tendencies and powers of the universe. Revelation fulfils religion by bringing the heart of God within the heart of man.

Religion, because it is man's deepest, his final concern, is exceedingly apt to turn aside from the corporate life of man in time and space, in order to bring man's restless heart to rest upon the things unseen and eternal. To satisfy man's religious need and at the same time to keep his heart within the nation's history by finding a vast store of

treasure there—this is extremely difficult. The religious history of India proves it on a great scale. Kipling's story, "The Mystery of Purun Baghat," illustrates this. The Hindoo mystic puts off the entire substance of history, the life of the family and the state, puts it off as if it were a loose-fitting garment, no part of the frame of life. The history of monasticism in the Christian church brings the proof to our doors. Religion in its higher and intenser forms belittles the historical in the interest of the eternal. To render the eternal at home within the historical, to make the historical the mold and expression of the eternal, that is the final test of religion.

Prophetism answers the test. For it the question of the moral order in the nation's life is the supreme question. And this is just another way of saying that the question of law, of an authority that can bind and loose in the moral issues of the nation, is the supreme question. For law rests upon and is the expression of the sense of order. That sense moves on diverse levels, but its quality remains the same. The man who takes a lot of street arabs and reforms them, wisely begins by making them a team, a baseball nine or a football eleven. They learn to value team-play and to restrain the brute egotist in the interest of order. Then he teaches them to debate, and to learn by personal experience the value of parliamentary law. So he leads them from organized sports upward into a consciousness of the moral law. Constitutional government, with its related and inseparable ideals of freedom and law, is but a higher form of this process of education. The top and crown of the process is the moral order within the historical life of man. It means a sense of infinite, immeasurable values within the nation's life, so that, in devotion to the nation's interests, man finds within himself moralizing energies hitherto unknown or unemployed. The true religion identifies itself with the moral order. The being and sanctity of the nation become the channel through which the consciousness of ultimate reality expresses itself, the mold in which the truth about God is shaped. Prophetism gives to the nation the Deuteronomic Code. It attacks the conscience of the nation with the Decalogue, it publishes the law for Israel, a body of common corporate working convictions, and it bases them on the being and sanctity and unity of God.

What the belief in the unity of nature is to the student of nature,

that the prophetic belief in the unity of God is to the student of human life and destiny. To the student of nature there is no knot of mental difficulties so hard that it will not dissolve before patient, reverent, and untiring reason. To the student of humanity there is no moral difficulty that will not give way before the belief in divine and human unity.

So the religion of the prophet is in its very essence a religion of hope. Not, however, primarily hope for the individual as such. It is hope for the sacred nation of which he forms a part. In the darkness and desolation of the Exile, when the eye could see nothing but national bankruptcy, the voice of prophetism declares that God's highway shall run across the desert (Isa. 40:1 ff.). The power of God shall bring the dead nation to a resurrection (Ezek., chap. 37). When, in the majestic drama of Aeschylus, Prometheus is recounting the blessings he has bestowed upon men, he ends the list with "the blind hopes" that make struggle and aspiration possible. Prophetism takes those blind hopes and, inspiring and unifying them with the knowledge of the true God, becomes the light and illumination of the nation's life. So cometh into the world

Hope that doth create

From its own wreck the things it contemplates.

Says Luther, "All great things that are done in this world are done by hope." And again a poet says it is "our mighty hopes that make us men."

But the hope of the prophet is not an individual's hope. It is the reformer's hope of moral advance and perfection based on his experience of a moral order in the nation's life guaranteed and insured by the being and will of God. Thus the foundations of hope are laid in faith. In the history of that one conception the entire history of our religion is involved. So let us be at pains to remember that prophetism set the conception on its great career. The inspiration and genius of prophetism shine out clearly in Habakkuk. Standing on his watch-tower and contemplating the prospect of an irresistible world-empire devouring his people, he publishes the indestructible conviction "that the righteous man shall live by his faith" in God and the chosen nation (2:4). And again, in the teeth of immense odds he sings the paean (3:17-18):



For though the fig-tree shall not flourish,  
 Neither shall fruit be in the vines,  
 The labor of the olive shall fail,  
 And the fields shall yield no food;  
 The flock shall be cut off from the fold,  
 And there shall be no herd in the stalls:  
 Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah,  
 I will joy in the God of my salvation.

If we took the Old Testament as a book of final truth about God and man, we should have to do all manner of violence to the plain sense in order to make it suit our purpose. As historical study is opening it to us, it contains many things that bespeak the imperfect moral culture, the racial passions and the primitive religious emotions out of which it sprang. The Old Testament Canon was born of a supreme compromise, the compromise between the creative moral genius of prophetism and the ritualistic religion which it so mercilessly criticized. The nineteenth chapter of Leviticus shows at a glance how the two forces have blended:

Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy; for I Jehovah your God am holy. Ye shall fear every man his mother and father; and ye shall keep my sabbaths: I am Jehovah your God.—And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am Jehovah your God.—Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am Jehovah.

Here speaks a splendid passion for morality and justice. In vss. 19 and 27 with the same emphasis and valuation speaks the ritual law:

Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seed: neither shall there come upon thee a garment of two kinds of stuff mingled together.—Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard.

The ethical and the ritual views and valuations of conduct are fused. In that fusion lay both the strength of Judaism and its weakness. We find a priesthood that constitutes a real caste. We have the beginnings of a monotheistic orthodoxy which may become in course

of time a dangerous enemy to vital religion and great-hearted morality. The scorn and hatred of one people for other peoples is dedicated to the glory of God.

But the Old Testament, rightly seen, becomes all the more valuable. It is the book of mediation between our Lord and primitive religion. It is the unique book of testimony to the method of divine revelation, the process whereby God saves man. We have defined religion in all its forms as that deepest form of feeling and experience whereby man, conscious of his backing in the unseen universe, faces and overcomes the fears that beset him. We now define prophetic religion as that consciousness of backing by the holy and creative divine unity which delivers the Israelite from fears regarding the worth and dignity and future of his nation, securing to him as an individual his standing and dignity within the national ideal (Dan. 12:13). God gives to Israel a body of majestic promises. Abraham, the typical Israelite, believes God. His faith, exalting him above all the fears that would unman him, is valued by God as the supreme moral element in life (Gen. 15:8; Rom. 4:3). This is the blood and breath of vital morality. It is man's righteousness.

In order to make our thinking on the problem of authority straight and clear, we have carried our fundamental terms into the light of the Old Testament. The upshot of our study is that the idea of authority must keep company with a certain body of working conceptions, being assured that it can refuse to travel in their company only under peril of serious error. The saving truth of our religion heads up in the truth of divine unity. We are saved by faith, that means by complete self-surrender to a holy creative spiritual reality which indeed transcends our grasp and powers by an infinite range, yet is irresistibly intimate with our experience of life. The self-revelation of the divine unity unifies our experience. But it does not give itself with saving power, it does not carry full conviction, to the mystic and the monk. The man who embodies the bias and bent of our religion is the prophet. The staple of his thinking is his nation's unity and hope. His faith in God bottoms and grounds his faith in the spiritual and moral perfectibility of his nation. The prophet says to the God of the nation "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee"

(Isa. 6:3). Faith in God gives him moral certitude, a solid conviction touching the moral quality and end of history.

Certitude varies according to the objects it deals with, the ends it works for. Commercial confidence rests upon the conviction that the business fabric is substantially sound. Philosophical certitude rests upon the conviction of necessary and universal laws of thought, into the knowledge of which all men must come, if they think deeply and keep themselves out of the insane asylum. And authority varies with certitude. It is judged by its ends, the objects of desire and effort. Thus authority in the army is far more rigorous than authority in civil life, because only so can a mass of men of diverse temperaments and tempers be hammered into a fighting unit. Authority in the navy is more rigorous still, because the unit has to be more highly unified. To enable eight hundred men to live together on a long cruise inside a ship of war, authority presses upon the individual's life with tremendous molding power.

How deal with that vast mixed mass of forces and motives that go to the making of a people? Here the problem and ideal of authority reach the highest level of history. It involves the mystery of the corporate life on a majestic scale. It involves also the mystery of continuity whereby the prestige and power of a sacred past enter like living blood into the veins of the present. Prophetism struck a great compromise with primitive religion, and laid down the Torah as the base of the nation's unity. The nation's hope and the nation's law together constitute the moral order within which the Israelite finds and fulfils himself. The Book of Deuteronomy is both the catechism of the individual and the constitution, the organic law of the nation. The Torah concerns itself with the most intimate obligations of the inner life and at the same time polices a people (Exod., chaps. 22, 23). The nation and its law is the largest fact within the view of the Old Testament.

What, then, is the end by which we must judge authority in the field of religion? Upon the answer to that question our entire study turns. Now, if we think with the prophets, there is but one thing to say at this stage of our study. Whether we must change our statement when we reach the New Testament is a point for the New Testament itself to settle. But so far, our conviction is as straight as a ray of light.

The object of desire and labor and prayer is the moralization of the nation. The power that toils toward that end is the creative will of God in man which makes for righteousness. The corporate expression of that creative will is man's law. Staying his heart upon that will and law, man attains a radiant moral certitude. The student of nature has great joy when some far-reaching view gives order and intellectual beauty to the vast mass of phenomena challenging, stimulating, and confounding his mental vision. Higher and holier is the joy of the ransomed of the Lord. Out of captivity to the tyrannies of world-trade and world-politics, out of spiritual gloom and moral despair (Isa. 35:10), they return and come with singing unto Zion: they obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing flee away.